

College role seen in jobs training

Long Beach Press Telegram, Thursday, January 24, 2008

Kevin Butler, Staff writer

NORWALK - Expanding opportunities for California high school students to take career and technical classes at community colleges was among several ideas for improving education discussed Wednesday by a panel that included Lt. Gov. John Garamendi.

After touring the Cerritos College campus, Garamendi joined a panel of college administrators, state officials and businesspeople to discuss the challenges facing community colleges in preparing the California workforce of the future.

Panelists discussed the role of the state-funded Regional Occupation Programs, which allow high school students to take classes at community colleges to learn career and technical skills.

Garamendi noted that in a challenging budget environment, school districts can't afford the investment in the faculty, facilities and technology that community colleges possess in order to teach such technical courses.

"We're not going to see the money to build those laboratories in the high schools," said Garamendi, who chairs the California Commission on Economic Development.

Career and technical education has received increased attention in recent years as a way of providing well-paying careers to high school students who choose not to pursue a four-year degree immediately after getting their diploma.

After years of cutting back on vocational education programs like auto shop, school districts across the state are re-examining the issue.

Gil Montano, superintendent of Southeast Regional ROP, discussed Cerritos College's program allowing high school students to take automotive technology courses at the campus.

Often students who are disinterested in traditional high school curriculum after taking those auto tech courses at Cerritos College will become more motivated to complete a high school diploma, said Montano.

Community colleges and school districts are bracing for funding cuts following the release of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposed state budget.

Schwarzenegger is seeking a \$40 million cut for the state's community colleges this year, plus another \$483.5 million in 2008-2009.

Garamendi said that the proposed education cuts are among the reasons why the governor's budget plan is a "nonstarter" with the state legislature, which will review and approve any new budget.

"I think you will see a different budget evolve in the next several months," he said after the forum.